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ONE: [redacted]

NSC Briefing Note

MAJOR SOVIET OFFENSIVE MISSILES

A. Intelligence community has just completed new estimate on characteristics and operational availability dates of those missile types posing greatest potential threat to US and key overseas bases.

1. Includes ICBM, other ground-launched ballistic missiles of 700 and 1100 nautical miles maximum ranges, and submarine-launched missiles of both ballistic and cruise types.

2. In arriving at this estimate, USIB has been supported by its standing committee of guided missile specialists and assisted by special panel of consultants from other branches of government and industry.

3. Analysis aided considerably by past year's accumulation of new data [redacted] 25X1D4a but 25X1D4a many critical gaps still exist in evidence.

B. ICBM test-firing program has proceeded in orderly manner during 1959; believe it is effectively testing a complete missile system.

1. Since inception of firing program in August 1957, have been well over a dozen ICBM shots, high percentage of them successful in traversing 3,500 n.m. test range.

2. Have been periods of launching activity and inactivity in this and other missile test programs.

a. Recall that in last half of 1958 Sovs achieved no successful ICBM or space vehicle launching, ~~despite several attempts.~~

b. Evidence not sufficient to determine whether there was a setback in the program; periodicity of testing activity ~~may be~~ is Soviet method of conducting an orderly program.

C. In any event, rate and number of ICBM shots lower than we had expected, and we believe it now well established that Sovs are not engaged in "crash" development program.

1. But still consider it logical for them to seek substantial ICBM capability at earliest reasonable date.

2. IOC date represents time when the buildup begins, as well as time when ICBM could be counted on to perform limited tasks in event of war.

3. Based on estimated production lead-times and K's statements, believe IOC ~~could~~ would probably be established with series produced missiles in lieu of previously estimated prototype missiles.

D. In light of all evidence, estimate that a Soviet IOC with a few -- say, 10 -- series produced ICBMs is at least imminent, if it has not already occurred.

1. Evidence is insufficient, however, to support precise estimate of IOC date.

2. Believe that for planning purposes should consider that by 1 January 1960, it will have occurred.

3. Some members of USIB dissent from this view -- Defense, Joint Staff, Army and Navy members believe IOC will probably occur in first half of 1960, with possibility of its occurring in latter part of 1959.

E. Evidence on ICBM performance better than before but still far from satisfactory; Air Force member of USIB believes two different ICBM configurations have been test-fired, but all USIB members agree to following estimate of present characteristics:

1. Maximum warhead weight probably 6,000 pounds in a heatsink nose-cone, based on analysis of ICBM and space vehicle shots (previous estimate was probably 2,000 and possibly 5,000 pounds).

2. Maximum range about 5,500 n.m. with 6,000 pound warhead, and could be greater with lighter warhead (for example, about 7,500 n.m. with 3,000 pound warhead).

3. Accuracy. CEP at 5,500 n.m. range theoretically about 3 n.m., which would be degraded to not greater than 5 n.m. under operational conditions; will improve to 3 n.m. in 1963 and 2 n.m. in 1966.

4. Reliability. About 50 percent of ICBMs successfully launched would reach general target area, but considering in-commission rate and reliability en launcher, percentage of operational inventory reaching general target area ~~might be only about 30 percent~~ (when system is first operational). There will be progressive improvement in reliability factors as experience is gained in launching and training of crews.

5. Deployment may be in rail mobile units, fixed installations, or a combination of the two; believe flexibility, security, and relative invulnerability of rail con ept is very appealing to Soviet planners.

6. Improvements can be expected, especially in accuracy and reliability, as system matures.

F. Continue to estimate that 700 and 1,100 n.m. ballistic missiles now in production and available for operational use, although have still not identified any operational units or installations.

1. These missiles can carry warheads of about 3,000 pounds, with CEPs at maximum range of about 2 n.m. for the 1,100 mile missile and 1-2 n.m. for the 700 mile missile.

2. Are capable of reaching large majority of critical targets in Eurasia and periphery from launching points in USSR.

3. Failure to identify and locate units probably results in part from mobile deployment concept (road and/Or rail) without fixed installations.

G. At least one and perhaps two submarine-launched missile systems are now operational in small numbers of converted long-range subs.

1. Include a subsonic cruise-type system with maximum range of 150-200 n.m., low altitude cruise capability, warhead of 2,000 pounds, CEP of 2-4 n.m. and possibly better.

2. Also, some submarines may have been modified to carry and launch ballistic missiles of comparable range and accuracy, with warhead of about 1,000 pounds.

3. Believe both these systems would require submarine to surface for launching.

4. Considering Soviet requirements and capabilities, and small amount of inconclusive evidence, estimate that in 1961-1963 USSR will probably achieve a more advanced sub-launched ballistic missile system.

   a. Will probably be capable of delivering 1,000 pound warhead to maximum range of 500 - 1,000 n.m. with accuracy of 2-4 n.m.

   b. Such a system could be launched from a submerged submarine.